



Written Testimony

Submitted

By

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Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on Senate Bill 989, *An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Program Review and Investigations Committee Concerning a Plan for Public Institutions of Higher Education to Reduce the State's Achievement Gap*.

On behalf of the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut, I fully support the legislation to require the public institutions of higher education in Connecticut to assist in closing the achievement gap.

The achievement gap in Connecticut is a real and complex problem and closing the gap will take a sustained and comprehensive effort from educational stakeholders, unions, parents, policy makers and leaders from the business community across the state. In order to address this crisis the Neag School has been given a unique opportunity to hire a cluster of faculty dedicated to closing the achievement gap in Connecticut.

In 2012, I proposed a hiring plan to UConn President Susan Herbst to form a research team to conduct research and guide policy and practice implementation at the state, district and school levels focused on closing the achievement gap and improving low performing schools in Connecticut.

The Neag School of Education was granted eight new faculty positions to form a purpose-built institute to research the causes and consequences of the achievement gap and find policy and practice solutions to close it. The institute will be staffed by eight faculty across four departments – Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Psychology, Educational Leadership, and Public

Policy – with expertise in literacy, mathematics education, bilingual education, school reform, education policy, large scale assessment, disabilities, and school climate and a demonstrated interest in student educational equity and its impact on understanding and improving policies, practices, systems, and outcomes for chronically, under-performing schools.

We are well underway in hiring faculty who will work collaboratively in the research cluster to (a) validate interventions, practices, systems, and policies that have meaningful impact on school improvement in chronically under-performing schools; (b) participate actively in state and federal policy development, decision making, and research; and (c) proactively engage in quantitative research related to improving functions and outcomes in chronically under-performing schools.

Specifically, the research team will (a) conduct research that identifies conditions, practices, policies, and contexts that are associated with durable and effective improvements in academic performance so as to close the achievement gap; (b) demonstrate the efficient transfer of research outcomes and results to practice implementation in traditionally low performing schools; (c) inform the professional development and preparation of leadership and teaching personnel at the pre- and in-service levels for working conditions in low-performing schools; (d) engage community, school, and state stakeholders in an informed and unified effort to improve achievement in low-performing schools; and (e) establish an institute with a clear vision, effective language system, efficient operating system, and strong leadership capacity.

It is anticipated that, over time, an Institute for School and Student Achievement (ISSA) will be established at the Neag School that will become a regional and national clearinghouse on strategies for low-performing schools across the nation to turn around and improve student performance.

As I look to the future our vision is clear—the Neag School is dedicated to developing a team of faculty committed to conducting research and working collaboratively with educators, parents, unions, legislators, and state department of education personnel to turn around our lowest performing schools in Connecticut. Narrowing the achievement gap is both an economic and moral imperative for the future of our state as well as the children of Connecticut and will be the single most important effort of the Neag School of Education over the next few years.